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INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1950
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1941
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1914
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1865
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1391
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 1142
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0766

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STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL/SEA

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SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DAY EVENTS IN TAJIKISTAN

11. SUMMARY: Embassy Dushanbe commemorated International Human Rights Day/Week with a variety of events: having students paint a mural on the Embassy walls, showing a Human Rights related movie followed by a discussion group, and hosting a number of public speaking events focused on the theme "Defending the Defenders." END SUMMARY

12. Embassy Dushanbe teamed with 15 local design students to create and paint a mural outside the Embassy commemorating Human Rights Day. The Ambassador opened up the event with brief remarks on the meaning of the day, and then the design students went to work. This mural is the first of a series of paintings planned around the Embassy compound to mark such events as Earth Day and Women's Day.

13. PAO, PolOff and DCM spoke at three different local universities about the importance of Human Rights Day, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the current status of freedom in Tajikistan. Between 25 and 50 students showed up for each event, with the students asking a variety of perceptive questions on topics from media self-censorship in Tajikistan to the U.S.'s role in the war in Iraq. The appetite for Embassy speakers was apparent when rectors, teachers and students all asked for increased officer visits for roundtables and the chance to speak English with a native speaker. PAO also led a roundtable on human rights at the Embassy-sponsored weekly English Language conversation club.

14. Keeping with the "Defending the Defenders" theme, Saturday culminated with a screening of "Hotel Rwanda" and discussion about genocide. Approximately 50 locals and expats, including students and NGO workers attended the event. The program opened with an American citizen NGO director with experience in Rwanda providing background facts about the genocide and ended up with him leading a lively discussion after the movie.

15. The Embassy also distributed the Fact Sheet on U.S. Human Rights Initiatives and the Secretary's December 14 remarks.

16. COMMENT: The discussions with students and locals showed that Tajiks are aware of the human rights problems in their country and desire change. Many of the students with whom we met recognized the problem of self-censorship in the Tajik media, and rely instead on information from the Internet to shape their opinions. All sought more opportunities to meet with Americans and other foreigners in order to increase their

exposure to the outside world. This younger generation of Tajiks has little direct memory of the civil war and does not unquestioningly credit the government or President Rahmonov with maintaining stability. As they comes of age, they may begin demanding greater changes from their government with respect to issues such as corruption and freedom of speech. This week's human rights focused meetings remind us once again that Tajikistan would benefit greatly from increased exchange opportunities. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON